DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 030 091 AL 001 783

By-Brooks, Charlotte E.

Motivating Students for Second-Language and Second-Dialect Learning.

Pub Date Mar 69

Note-14p., Paper presented at the Third Annual TESOL Convention, Chicago, Illinois, March 5-8, 1969.

EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.80

Descriptors-*Disadvantaged Youth, *English (Second Language), *Motivation, Non English Speaking, *Nonstandard Dialects, Second Language Learning, *Social Dialects, Teacher Attitudes, Tenl

Natural and honest ways must be found to motivate disadvantaged students for second-dialect and second-language learning. Young children, actors, and foreigners seem to learn new dialects and languages easily because they have a strong motivation as a part of their environments. In order to motivate students, we must take into consideration the two functions of language--revelation of the self and communication. Any motivation used with these learners must consider them as human beings who have already learned a first language that is a part of them, that defines them and communicates for them. Teachers need to be motivated to accept their students' first language or dialect, in both its verbal and non-verbal manifestations, and to expect success in learning another language or dialect. Once the teacher has communicated this acceptance and expectation to his students, he is ready to move on to specific varieties of motivation. The methods chosen must involve honesty on the part of the teacher and an attempt to recognize the students' culture. One suggestion in such a way that the learner feels that the dominant community and the teacher want to learn about him. The the learner is willing to accept and learn poems and stories in English or the standard dialect. (JD)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

"MOTIVATING STUDENTS FOR SECOND-LANGUAGE AND SECOND-DIALECT LEARNING"

by

Charlotte E. Brooks

Linguists do the research - Linguists and teachers prepare materials - For whom is this done; who will use it? For use -- see teachers and learners (pre-school, elementary, secondary, adult).

Shakespeare has spoken, in Julius Caesar, of "a tide in the affairs of men, that, taken at the flood leads on to fortune!" This is the point at which one must move; this is the moment for motivation! To thoroughly ruin this metaphor, let me say that I observe a sea of faces; the time has come; I shall leap into the tide!

AL 001 783

Children are born with a built-in motivation for second-language and second-dialect learning. They are open and trusting little beings who readily give up babbling and lallation in order to learn eagerly whatever language is offered them with the love and care they receive as infants.

Later, as they play with siblings and with peers they learn second, third; even fourth languages: pig latin, slang, soul talk; hip language; whatever "in-language" is used by their peers. As they play rope, ball games and jacks they have no difficulty at all absorbing exotic and even nonsensical terminology. And group games with more complicated language are learned from playmates with little or no teaching from adults.

It is only when children go to school that they seem to lose this first fine enthusiasm, that their great interest in and ability to learn varieties of language is killed, that they lose the strong motivation they have to play with language, to try on different versions, to enjoy building new vocabularies. Until then, without thinking about it, they have seemed to see themselves as learners of language and they have learned language. I omit from this rather sweeping judgment the FLES program. Foreign languages are learned by young children. Unfortunately, a peculiar prejudice among some foreign language teachers keeps all but the college-bound from taking foreign languages. This is odd, since foreigners learn foreign languages -- slow, college bound, or not. In foreign lands poor and uneducated children and adults learn English and use it quite easily to earn money from English and American tourists. They learn quickly, and they learn varieties of English. They learn because they must, and this seems motivation enough. The same kinds of people, attending school in this country, appear to learn far more slowly. Again, a built-in motivation must have been destroyed. In bilingual homes, youngsters learn to speak two or more languages and differentiate among them grammatically and appropriately.

Actors, young and old, learn quite easily to use a number of dialects. Sidney Poitier, a West Indian, uses his own dialect, can speak proper Oxbridge and "improper" Cockney, uses standard American English, and undoubtedly can learn any dialect he needs for a role in any film he chooses to make. He, and others like him, are motivated by acting requirements.

If young children are motivated to play with language, and do so; if poor and illiterate workers are motivated to learn languages in order to eat, and do so; if talented actors, musicians and others are motivated to learn many languages and dialects, and do so; it must be true that we can learn from them something that will be useful to linguists and educators who want to motivate students for second-language and second-dialect learning.

And there's the rub! The groups just cited needed no outside agency to provide motivation. The motivation came from within -- from a need to learn in order to play, to work, and to express a demanding talent. Perhaps, then it is not the learner who needs motivation so much as the person who must work with the learner. If he is correctly motivated he can look for natural and honest ways to motivate his students.

What is language, and what does it mean to the user. It certainly is not just a stream of sound broken into words, phrases, and sentences. It certainly is not a fixed and set pattern of "correct" ways of speaking and writing, historically the same in the past and present; to remain the same in the future. Geographically it is not the same all over this land. Some people treat it as though it were, and attempt to fit all learners into a dreadful and dull mold of "correct grammar and usage." The nonverbal language of proximity, gestures and facial expressions is often ignored. This ignorance of what language is and what it means to the user effectively cancels motivation.

The first function is revelation. Language -- the non-verbal and verbal first language *is* the user. It has been absorbed with the food of infancy. It has been used in play with family and friends. It has been used, by older learners, in the initial school and working experiences. It cannot be separated from the *self* of the person because it defines that self. The language illuminates the person and reveals him to himself and to others. It is accepted as he uses it, and it is used by others in the same way within that circle. Thus, it shows the person who he is. This is always the first, essential function of language.

The second function is communication. Here the first language is perfectly adequate in the learner's family and among his friends. It is useful, it is understood, it gets the user what he wants. And what else is there?

Then the learner, who has been beautifully motivated to learn his language so that he can see himself as a person and so that he can communicate comes to another land, to another community, or to a school. The self which has already been defined is far too often not even *seen* as an attempt [and] is made to show the learner what he is *not* -- a user of adequate English. The attempts at communication are corrected as the learner is taught standard English as though that were the only existing way to communicate.

In these unfortunate cases, motivation consists of an attempt to "sell" standard English as the way into the powerful and educated community, as the way to a job, as the way to the expression of talent. But if it really were, the learner would know it and would learn without needing outside stimulation. He always does learn when he knows this. And now, in growing numbers, he either refuses to believe that this is the way in, or he says that he does not want to join this larger community. Thus he rejects second language and second language learning and insists upon doing his own thing.

What, then can be done to help?
What happens to a dream deferred?

Langston Hughes' line asks a question not yet answered and poses a problem that cannot readily be solved. It has implications for motivating second language and second dialect learning.

What happens to a dream deferred?
Does it dry up like a raisin in the sun,
Or fester like a sore and then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat,
Or crust and sugar o'er like a syrupy sweet?
Does it sag like a heavy load,
Or does it explode?

If that deferred dream is the hope of being accepted in the American community as a human being of worth, and if the person with that dream speaks a foreign language or a nonstandard dialect, it is important to know whether learning a second language or dialect *will really help that dream* to come true. And it is not enough coldly to consider just the motivation, the techniques and the materials needed. If these are simply intended to create conforming, useful -- and usable -- people-people for the American economy -- people who may become expendable again when they are not needed - the dream will explode; will become a nightmare. In simple humanity, any motivation used with these learners must consider them first as human beings who have already learned a first language that is a part of them, that defines them and communicates for them. And part of their motivation must be simple and honest answers to their questions:

Why must I learn a second language or
dialect if I am not to be seen or
recognized first as myself?

What is wrong with my first language?
(Why don't <u>you</u> learn <u>my</u> language?)

Are you rejecting my first language,
and with it my nation (or community),
my family and friends?

And what if I <u>do</u> learn this other?
Will it really help me or is it just
another hurdle you are making me jump--
only to be confronted with another -- and
another -- and another?

> Are you saying "Stop being you; be me?" when this is impossible? Are you saying that my parents and friends are lazy, and wrong? What are you saying to me?

Teachers not learners, need the essential motivation if they are to answer these questions. This is a true story about such a person. A Teacher of French in a state near Washington, D.C., spoke recently about the Spanish speaking people who attend a large high school there. "They don't have the right attitude," she said about them. "They just don't want to learn." She was asked who taught them. A Latin teacher. So few students now take Latin that the principal assigned these classes to her. "But they just won't learn English. They won't work." I wonder what that Latin teacher would do in Spain or in South America if she were locked upon contemptuously as "having the wrong attitude" when she refused to have the language forced upon her. And I wonder how the administrators, teachers and other students treat these Spanish students. I wonder if their culture is explored, if their knowledge is used; if their language is learned. I wonder if the Latin teacher has bothered to learn any Spanish.

And about those who are to learn a second dialect. "They have sloppy, lazy speech. They just don't want to learn. They won't even listen to me."

Teachers, who must be motivated first, need two very important points of view if their motivation and their teaching are to be successful.

First, acceptance; second, expectation.

By acceptance is meant the general attitude of the teacher. Teachers of English as a second language must accept the first language as a perfectly useful and capable and legitimate tongue, to be used as a matter of course when its use is appropriate: at home, in church; with friends.

When the teacher does not know the first language he certainly does not fiddle around with it, or correct it, or criticize it. He simply accepts it and proceeds to teach English as a second language. But this is not quite enough.

The teacher of English as a Second Language should know more about the first languages of his students. He can teach English more readily if he is willing to learn. People who teach must be willing to find out everything possible about the people they teach, their culture, their life style -- and there is nothing more motivating than simple and honest willingness to learn these things: to have a mutuality of the learning experience so that the teacher is often a learner and the learners teachers.

In England, the American teacher who was willing to learn from students British spelling (labour, jewellery), vocabulary (scruffy cot, napkin), grammar (woken, learnt), pronunciation (controversy) found that they watched and listened closely in order to teach; therefore students learned more because they were accepted and attentive.

The teacher of English as a second dialect, in addition to this, will remember that nonstandard English is much like standard English and he might even try to learn it from students. It isn't easy. Try conjugating a verb in non-standard English, leaving off the "s" in third person singular. If language differences can be discussed objectively in England, why not -- without prejudice -- in America? These differences are seen and accepted there; why not here?

Without a look of distaste (those lazy lips and tongues!) a level stare of contempt (sloppy people speak a sloppy language!) a cold look, (why can't they talk the way I do?) a step back (they stand too close when they talk!) -- the teacher must accept the language in both its nonverbal and verbal manifestations.

Without acceptance other motivation is useless. Students will sit in the room and may mechanically go through drills. But they are not really there, when they are not seen as themselves, and there is no communication when the teacher sees himself as the only giver of knowledge; the only communicator - Jehovah.

The twin of acceptance is expectation. Here again, the teacher of English as a second language has the edge. He has been accustomed to success with already highly motivated diplomats, business men, and students who know they must learn English. (With others, poor Puerto Ricans, servants in embassies and with working class immigrants there is sometimes less success.) Again, though, the teacher of English as a second dialect is usually that same English teacher who has been somewhat successful in teaching the highly motivated middle class youngsters and who does not know that there is a logical grammar in the nonstandard varieties of English. These teachers do not really expect success, and subtly or boldly convey this failure of expectation to their students. They don't have to say a word; the students read them clearly. In this failure, incidentally, there is successful -- often non-verbal -- communication. This alone should clue teachers in to the marvelous learning abilities students have. If they can be taught so wordlessly, so easily, how little they are accepted and how little is expected of them -- if they can so subtly and gently be motivated to fail, why cannot they just as wordlessly and subtly and gently be taught their worth as persons, and assured of their ability to learn.

The initial and most important motivation are then:

First, accept and value the language, whatever is is -- and make sure the learner knows!

Then, expect success in learning and again, make sure the learner knows!

If the teacher has understood the two primary functions of language, self-identity and communication, and if he has learned the two essential motivations for learning, acceptance and expectation, he should now be ready to move to more specific varieties of motivation.

Honesty is the first and best motivation for second language and second dialect learning.

If the teacher does not know the other language or dialect, he should say so. And perhaps at the first meeting he should try to learn a little. This provides that openness that is essential for learning.

An extension of this first kind might be a day or more spent in encouraging the class to teach the teacher its words for items in the room, necessary functions; parts of the body. The teacher can then give his words and phrases. Many little children incidentally are "turned" off when their words, brought from home, are rejected.

Just this week, in Rhode Island, a kindergarten teacher spoke of a class of younsters who had just been taught lavatory.

"See this room with a girl on the door? Who will use this lavatory."

"The girls," said the youngsters.

"And who will use this lavatory with the picture of the boy."

"Boys," chorused the youngsters.

While the lines were forming a little boy came rushing up and said, "I've got to pee."

The teacher said, "We have just learned a new way of saying that, haven't we, dear."

"Yes, I know about the boys' lavatory, but I've really got to pee right now!"

In moments of stress, everyone uses the language he knows best, and teachers had better recognize this. This can be used for motivation. The crushed child can be cut off this early; the accepted one will learn.

Another example of a language problem that might lead to motivation is from a junior high school in Washington with a large Spanish population. There had been a number of fights, and when a Spanish teacher revealed that the word for "That's enough" is "Basta" I could see why.

A child pushes another, or yells at him, or a teacher or policeman might reprimand. If the Spanish person's reply is Basta! -- that's enough.

Yet, if students, teachers, policemen and others would just learn the words that might cause confusion and lack of understanding in a Spanish-English community, causes of friction would be removed and there would be great motivation to learn English.

And such knowledge of non-verbal items as gestures that are innocently insulting, shaking hands with the left hand - unforgivable in some places, should be known.

Quickly now, I shall cite come other useful motivations for both second language and second dialect learning.

1. Using real life situations that permit sharing with others, like clubs for studying Spanish-American (or Franco-American or Afro-American) culture. Parliamentary procedures in standard English can be worked into these. Taping permits self evaluation. Bulletin boards, programs and seminars would give many chances for sharing cultural diversity.

2. Role playing and drama in English and in other languages. Sometimes structured, sometimes using scripts; sometimes free, these might offer opportunities for introducing playwrights from other lands.

3. Tag days, when everything in a given area, like a classroom, is tagged with English and other names. It is essential here that the teacher learn the other terms -- or at least make the attempt, since the object is motivation rather than actual learning at this point. Non-standard terms can be used in this way also. (John, soul-food, spider, etc.)

4. Sharing the music and art of other lands, and perhaps making an attempt to discuss favorite pieces in English should motivate. In music, some attempt can be made to compare standard and nonstandard dialects in rock-and roll song titles, "The Boots Are Made for Walkin."

5. Using passages from literary sources written in an earlier dialect; then translating it to modern English. Chaucer and Shakespeare are useful here.

6. A dramatic incident like a simulated fire or accident can show learners how dangerous failure to communicate can be. Again , this is two-way communication, and since in moments of stress people do revert to the original tongue, (Little boy - Basta!) it is important

to say -- and to see that something is done -- that policemen, ambulance men, firemen and others know the language or dialect of the community in which they work.

7. Pictures and films in which people see speakers of their tongue are important. If the language identifies the self, this important use restates the role of the individual and reinforces his worth. He is then open to learning.

8. Poems and stories -- often folk tales -- in the language of the learner should be shared regularly. It is important that the teacher and others in the dominant community share -- sometimes learn -- these. Then the learner is willing to accept and learn poems and stories in English and in the standard dialect.

9. One of the most successful motivations is the "uninformed teacher approach." There is nothing more dreadful than know-all Miss Fidditch who is omnipotent and overpowering, patronizing and pedantic; the bearer of all worthwhile knowledge - the maker of grocery lists! She is the upholder of so-called standards, neat and nasty, clean but with a closed mind, the narrow and knowledgeable, unseeing and unforgivable purveyor of the useless, incorrect and deadly dull nonsense. The often brilliant children of the poor have these horrors inflicted upon them. Ole Missis of the southern plantations, misguided missionaries who, even today, think that they can solve "you people's problems" -- these are the teachers who kill all desire to learn. To teach well, be taught. Don't know it all; no one does. Be slightly stupid. Miss Fidditch says "they" can't learn dialogues or correct speech. They memorize lists of players and their averages; countless popular songs!

10. Use students as teachers.

11. Involve parents and the community in organizing programs. The best motivation is the knowledge that you have been consulted, you are the master of your fate, your opinions are valued, the work you do is planned by you, for you.

12. Persons who are bilingual and/or bidialectal should be used as consultants and should demonstrate their skill. They can come in person, they can appear on film or on television; they can be taped.

13. Games, like those learned and absorbed by very young children, effortlessly, can be used.

It is possible to be even more specific than this, but some things can be talked about too much. And some things cannot be talked about at all. There's a little poem -- with a non-standard use of "be," incidentally that would be appropriate here if I can substitute motivation for love. Esther Thomas wrote it.

I can't be talkin' of love, dear
I can't be talkin' of love
If there's one thing I can't talk of
Then one thing do be love.

Before leaving the subject of motivation for second language and second dialect learning, it is necessary to go from the subject of love to that of hate, for there is negative motivation that must be taken into account.

This is Chicago, and Chicago is a city that has seen confrontations and a breakdown in communication. The wounds have not healed here, nor have they healed in cities, on university campuses and in rural areas where people cannot or will not see or speak to each other. In these places it may already be too late for motivation. Or, perhaps, a negative motivation must be used where people are seeing the beauty of what is theirs; their life style, their appearance, their language.

In these places one can motivate the speaking of standard English for protection. A policeman does respond differently to a person whose non-verbal language--his stance and level look-- are middle class. Just

as the actor in England can get first class service in stores if he shifts to Oxbridge, so the "different" person in this land can evoke respect if he looks and sounds "standard." Here I am speaking of short-term shifting; not permanent change. Perhaps this is cynical, but it is true.

There is little need to discuss this more; let me finish by reiterating my concern about the importance of motivating for both second language and second dialect learning. Again, it must be remembered that language is every person's other self and that it identifies self in the eyes of that person and of others. It must also be remembered that communication is the second function of language.

Too, the first motivation is for the teacher, who must accept the language and with it the essential self of every person; then, he must expect that the learner <u>can</u> learn, because he has already learned.

Finally, if it is not already too late, motivation for learners must both precede and accompany use of appropriate methods and materials.

Then, an effort will have been made to communicate-- to speak with and listen to the learner. As Muriel Rukeyser says in "Effort at Speech between Two People:"

> I stood at a steep window hoping toward death
> If the sun has not lighted clouds and plains of beauty
> If light had not transformed that day
> I would have leapt
> I am unhappy. I am lonely. Speak to me.

Many speakers of other languages and users of non-standard English are standing, waiting. Lost, unhappy and lonely, they ask that someone accept them; expect them to be able to learn. Show them to themselves by valuing them and the language they use. Show them that it is not too late. Listen-- they are trying to speak to us.

> We must come right up front to say it like it is.
> We must leap into the tide.
> Ya basta!